

ILL in the fast lane: a Hong Kong perspective
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by
Ruth Wong Shuk-ching and Peter E. Sidorko

Abstract

While the University of Hong Kong Libraries (HKUL) enjoys access to a rich collection developed over its more than 90 year history, the extensive range of teaching and research activities compels the Libraries, like most other institutions of higher learning, to obtain items from local and overseas resources through interlibrary loan and document delivery. To ensure a high quality of service delivered in a cost effective manner, close partnerships locally and internationally and a low staff mediated ILL/document delivery system are seen as highly desirable. HKUL began automating interlibrary loan processes first through its use of Ariel and then with OCLC ILL services in 1992 and 1993 respectively. ILL/document delivery services, however, were still heavily paper based and intensive staff mediation was an inevitable consequence. To gain the maximum benefit from existing technologies, HKUL worked with three other Hong Kong academic libraries to investigate, evaluate and to implement an automated ILL/document delivery system in 2002. The introduction of this system, OCLC ILLiad, has enabled HKUL to participate more meaningfully in the digitized world of document delivery. This paper will focus on the difficulties encountered and the lessons learnt during the investigation, implementation and evaluation phases of the project. Issues relating to collaboration, automation, user empowerment and their subsequent impact on the ILL department and its staff will be explored. We will conclude with an outline of future dreams for ILL and document delivery at the University of Hong Kong Libraries.

Who are we?

University of Hong Kong, the first university in Hong Kong, was founded in 1910. The University is a comprehensive one with ten faculties offering 42 first degree and 43 Master's degree programmes. In 2001-2002 there were 14, 400 FTE government funded enrolled students in regular degree programmes of which 9,100 were undergraduates, 3,700 were postgraduates and 1,600 were M.Phil and Ph.D. students. The University also has an extension school, namely the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), who support continuing education in Hong Kong. The enrollment in this School is about 60,000 students each year.

The Mission of the University of Hong Kong Libraries

Two elements of the Libraries' Mission relate directly to interlibrary loan services. The first of these is 'to provide services which are closely linked with the University's priority' and the second is 'to collaborate with other regional, national and international academic institutions and counterparts for resource sharing.'

As a research intensive university of international standing, a major priority of the University is its research output. To keep pace with researchers needs, the Libraries provide significant dedicated support for procuring both local and overseas resources.

Most, if not all, researchers rely heavily on journal articles for new research output. It is especially true in the rapidly changing sciences. Thus, it is not uncommon that the rate of obtaining journal articles is considerably higher than that of books in our ILL office. This also contributes to the reason why, apart from the price of journals being higher than that

of monographs, the expenditure on serials for most academic/research libraries is far more than that on monographs. As an example the University of Hong Kong Libraries spent 61.8% and 67.1% of its total book funds on serials in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

Despite this increase in serials spending, it still has not been able to keep pace with the increased in user demand for articles. Under such a condition, the responsibility for obtaining copies of articles increasingly falls to the interlibrary loan department.

To achieve the second aspect of our mission, the Libraries joined OCLC in 2001 and started to actively participate in various regional and international projects. These activities have made the University of Hong Kong Libraries more transparent to the world. Researchers overseas including Australia, Canada, Taiwan, United States and some libraries in Europe can easily identify if our libraries stock the resources in which they are interested via WorldCat. They can then send interlibrary loan requests to us via Ariel, OCLC and email. As a result, ILL requests from overseas have steadily increased in recent years.

The Interlibrary Loans and Photocopying Department

The Libraries consist of one main and six branch libraries in the University. The ILL & Photocopying Department is located in the Main Library. Since 2002 following the introduction of an automated ILL system, all ILL services are now centrally offered by the department.

Prior to the installation of this automated system, all ILL borrowing requests were processed by the ILL department but subject specific ILL lending requests related to our branches were processed by those branch libraries. The ILL department only processed lending requests of materials located in the Main Library. Some external requesters would send ILL requests to the branches directly. All branches would fill the requests independently and a count of filled statistics would be submitted to the ILL department on a monthly basis.

The ILL system

An in-house ILL system was written in FoxPro. It contained a borrowing module with searching and tracking capabilities only. All statistical and financial reports had to be generated by using the query and report functions of FoxPro. All lending requests were stored in a separate Microsoft Access database.

Paper forms were the only request medium for ILL customers. Faxes were used between local libraries. Ariel, OCLC ILL and ARTTel were used for ordering resources in the United States and Great Britain. ILL staff had to input all data from the paper forms and the faxes to the in-house database. All ILL processes were highly mediated.

ILL automated system study

Since the functionalities of the in-house system were limited, the Libraries started to investigate alternatives in 1997. The Innopac Release 10 ILL module was evaluated. However, the evaluation was not favorable because Innopac lacks advanced accounting and statistical features which were suited to our internal purposes. We continued to develop our in-house system. In the year 2000, we evaluated the Millennium ILL module of Innopac but once again the accounting and statistical features did not satisfy our needs. The in-house system was further developed until 2002. There was also one important factor which affected this final decision: no other library in Hong Kong was using the ILL module of Innopac.

The power of cooperation – ILL system evaluation

The spirit and philosophy behind interlibrary loan services is cooperation and resource sharing. Without this cooperation, interlibrary loan services would not exist. Before 2002, all eight university libraries in Hong Kong were using eight different ILL systems. Seven were developed in-house and one was a commercial product. Requests sent and received were based upon faxes. Article delivery was in paper format. To better exercise the power of cooperation, the Librarians of three universities, namely, the Baptist University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, started to consider better mechanisms for ILL cooperation in July 2001. A cross-institutional task force was formed to evaluate an ILL automated system, namely OCLC's ILLiad. Our requirements dictated that the system must be user-friendly to both users and staff with functionalities of online requests, online renewal, electronic document delivery, generation of notices, searching and querying, accounting and statistics and user authentication.

As a joint effort, we were able to install this system in a shared server with a trial lasting three and a half months. During this trial period, the group was able to test the ISO ILL and to solve technical and procedural problems together. We were able to benefit from sharing our views and experiences from a variety of perspectives because all three institutions had different ILL policies, institutional and user needs and one institution has a satellite site. This led to a wider scope of discussions and understanding of the system.

All three university libraries finally decided to implement ILLiad in September 2001. Once this decision was made, a fourth university, the City University of Hong Kong, joined the cooperative group. As an even larger group we were able to organize group training sessions with individual site visits from Atlas Systems Inc. provided at a lower price.

The ripple didn't stop there. By September 2003, two more libraries had chosen the same automated system leaving only one university in Hong Kong using an in-house ILL system and another using a different commercial product.

Implementation - the challenges

New charging policy

To further support research and study at the University of Hong Kong, a cost recovery charging system was changed to a quota based one when the new automated system was launched in September 2002. Apart from year one and year two undergraduates, all students were given quotas for obtaining both local and overseas resources. This ILL quota system was also applied to teaching staff and postgraduate students who enrolled with the university's extension school, SPACE. Requests beyond these quotas were fulfilled on a cost recovery basis. The following table contains the details of our quota system:

Users	Quota
Terms of Service I staff	150
Research Staff, Research Assistants and Demonstrators	150
Postgraduates of the University of Hong Kong	125
Final year degree students *	25
SPACE Academics	100
SPACE higher degree students (local resources only)	100

With a new policy and a new automated system, new workflows needed to be redesigned and readjusted to address these significant changes. These newly designed workflows must be able to contribute to the goals of our centralized interlibrary loan services, to the ILL Department as well as enabling the Department to continue to meet or excel the Libraries' service standards.

New workflow: Centralization of interlibrary loan services

In the new system, requests from both internal and external customers are to be submitted to the ILL Department directly via a Web interface. External customers will no longer send interlibrary loan requests to branch libraries. This enables the Department to have better control on turnaround time and on collecting ILL statistics. All book and article dispatches are to be handled centrally by the Department. Books will be delivered by courier and articles delivered electronically. Communication between branches and the Department rely heavily on emails which are sent through the email function of the new system.

New workflow: meets the Libraries' service standards

Service standards are set for all departments at the University of Hong Kong Libraries. Delivery turnaround time is one of the major service standards of the ILL department. More than 85% of the deliveries should be done in four days if the resources can be found in Hong Kong and in two weeks if they are overseas resources. All articles should be delivered in electronic format. To keep up with this service standard, all double handling of records is eliminated. For instance, we use OCLC Passport macros to avoid retyping of titles in OPAC searching and to import call numbers and locations from OPACs to the request forms of the new ILL system. All email communications are to be sent directly through the new system to save time. We avoid retyping lending requests by requesting all external customers to use our LendingWeb, to use ISO ILL if their systems are compliant to this protocol and to import email requests from external customers to the new system.

Staff training

Change inevitably creates turmoil. Being accustomed to a manual system for many years, some staff in the department were psychologically resistant to these changes. For instance, only print copies of articles were delivered prior to the new system being implemented. Staff only made photocopies, recorded the pages in a manual sheet, packed the articles, wrote the addresses on the labels and mailed them. With the new system, the concept of document delivery changed entirely. Every step now involves using computer programs e.g. the client of the new system, email client, Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat and more. This resistance could be seen in staff who continued to use the old mode of working, e.g. keeping a count of pages even though they know that the new system or Acrobat Reader can record them. Some would open the old in-house system and the new system simultaneously because they thought that the in-house system might give them clues when they did not know what to do with the new system. These phenomena lasted for at least three months.

Despite these pockets of resistance, some measures were taken to better prepare staff to face these new changes:

Pre-installation of the new system

Exposure to the new system before the official training

The client of the new system was installed into all staff PCs two weeks before the official training commenced. Staff could spend half time within those two weeks to

familiarize themselves with the system. Unofficial training based on the manual was also given by the ILL Librarian. It was hoped that, given the early less formal exposure to the new system, staff would better understand the content of the official training as well as be able to retain the details of procedures more effectively.

After the new system was installed

Work buddies

Staff duties are grouped according to functions. These functions are borrowing, lending, document delivery, user education and photocopying. Two staff were placed in each group with one more competent and one less competent member in each. This system was adopted to encourage self directed learning, group discussions, sharing of experiences and exploration.

Training on popular computer software

To strengthen computing skills and to ease psychological obstacles, all staff were sent to training on basic computer software courses e.g. Microsoft Office offered by the Computer Centre of the University. Following the training, the staff confidence had been raised and many now found it easier to accept the new workflows.

Staff participation in logistics planning

All staff were encouraged to participate in planning discussions and many practical suggestions were accepted and incorporated into the new procedures. This has provided the advantage of a sense of ownership of the new processes and the notion that staff will be more inclined to remember their own ideas.

Are we successful or have we lost track and control of our fast lane?

Driving in the fast lane

The new system was implemented in September 2002. As of 1st October 2003, there were 1,465 eligible requesters from 118 departments registered online. The number of active ILL requesters has increased 36.15% as compared to 1,076 requesters from 78 departments in the year 2001. The numbers of borrowing and lending requests have increased 65.57% and 17.88% respectively. The increased lending transactions have all come from overseas libraries.

The average turnaround time for obtaining books and articles has been shortened by 3.29 and 9.97 days respectively. Obtaining books and articles via ILLiad is 22.35% and 42.8% faster respectively than via the old paper-form system.

The features of sending requests online and delivering documents electronically are the key factors in speeding up the process. At the same time, the improved turnaround time and increased usage of the service has occurred without any additional staffing of the ILL department.

Are we in control of the fast lane?

The success of the implementation has been measured by a user survey which was carried out between June and August in 2003.

Methodology¹

A questionnaire² on a 5-point scale was designed to measure user satisfaction of ILL staff, ILL services, the new system and preferred article delivery methods. The questionnaire

contained 15 questions. It was distributed to all users who came to our department and was posted on the Library homepage at the same time. There were 116 print copies returned with 13 copies incomplete. Interestingly, only 37 responses were collected online. Among all respondents, there were 27 faculty members, 83 postgraduates, 6 final year students and 24 administrative and other staff.

Results³

81.66% of the respondents were satisfied with timely notification and helpfulness of ILL staff. They agreed that ILL staff are helpful in answering questions and trying their best to get the requested resources. 87.86% of respondents are satisfied with the ILL Office's overall performance and 96.43% found round-the-clock electronic requesting to be very convenient. 84.28% of them like the new system and 80.71% are satisfied with the delivery time. However not all the respondents liked electronic document delivery. The survey reveals that 77.86% like electronic document delivery, 11.43% internal mail and 10.71% pickup at the ILL Office.

Observations

ILL staff are ready to answer questions- less satisfied

The new automated system put the department in a very transparent position. Processes which were once done in the back office can now be tracked and seen by customers. We received this comment from the survey "Staff are nice and helpful, especially kh_chan, joseph_YU." These names are login names in the system and apparently customers know these staff via the automated system. To some extent this transparency adds pressure to the staff. The pressures felt by those inexperienced to the new system may partially explain why respondents were less satisfied with the readiness of answering questions from ILL staff. I am sure that time and practice will help us to improve our services in this area in the near future.

Preferred article delivery method

The assumption that everyone prefers to take advantage of technology may not be entirely correct. From this survey we found that 22.14% of respondents preferred articles to be delivered by internal mail or to be picked up in the ILL Office. Among this group, they are in this order: Faculty members (33.3%), postgraduates (18%), final year students (16.6%) and other staff (8.3%). This survey replicates the result of a previous study which found that ILL customers do not want articles to be delivered electronically only.⁴ This finding will certainly be one of factors we will consider when we undertake future planning and review in the department.

"L platers" in the fast lane – what we learned

Cooperation gives power. In our experience it provided the essence of success, it was a source of inspiration and provided an efficient way to deal with problems. The ILL System Evaluation Task Force as a group solved problems much faster because our input was based on a variety of library settings, policies and library specific needs upon which we could draw. We, as the first customers of OCLC's ILLiad outside North America, encountered problems which other overseas libraries would never have previously experienced. For instance, Chinese, Japanese and Korean displays are very specific to Oriental/Asian libraries. We found that if ILL customers did not use Big5 encoding in their Web interfaces all data would not be deciphered properly in the new system. We also jointly shared ideas on customizing our new system to suit our individual needs. These included user authentication, Chinese character printing in pull slips, and email import to the lending module of the new system.

We also learnt from this automation exercise that the lack of refresher and consistency in training will be a major obstacle for surviving in this fast changing information speeding lane. Encouragement and staff development programs are the survival kits which we highly recommend. We know because we have seen the vivid changes in attitudes when ILL staff are empowered by training and participative decision making.

What dreamland will this fast lane lead to?

The University of Hong Kong Libraries keeps moving in this fast lane. We recently lead a taskforce with representatives from all Hong Kong university libraries to investigate various user initiated document delivery systems. These systems included SFX and Webbridge which are compliant to OpenURL protocol. The cooperation has allowed us to plan and to put into production and test of Innopac's INNReach with two other universities over an eight month period. The infrastructure of this trial is on its way and the trial production will start in January 2004.

Where will we stop? What will bring us to the land where ILL customers can benefit from new technologies in an ocean of information? We, the vehicle drivers learning in this fast lane, still have to wait and see. One thing that is certain is that Hong Kong's eight university libraries are prime candidates for further collaborative efforts.

¹ The questionnaire is attached at Appendix A.

² Stein, Joan (1999). 'Designing user satisfaction surveys for interlibrary loan services.' *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 1(1), pp. 45-61.

³ The results are represented in tubular form in Appendix B.

⁴ Kriz, Harry M. (2000). 'Electronic interlibrary loan delivery with Ariel and ILLiad.' *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Information Supply* 10(4) pp. 25-34.

Appendix A - Questionnaire

To help the Libraries maintain quality interlibrary loan services, your opinions and comments are invaluable. To enable us to serve you better we would appreciate your completing the following questionnaire.

1. I am a :

Faculty Postgraduate student Final year student Non-faculty Terms of Service I staff

Other:

2. I have requested the following via interlibrary loan in the past month

Books Articles Other:

3. I have placed the following number of requests in the past month

0 1-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 > 40

4. I prefer to place ILL requests by (check one):

Paper form Electronic form

Other:

5. I find it convenient to place ILL requests electronically.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

6. I received notifications about the outcomes of my requests in a timely manner (e.g. cancel and pick-up notices)

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

7. I am satisfied with the delivery time of my requests:

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

8. My interlibrary loan book requests should arrive within:

2 to 3 days 4 to 7 days 8-10 days 11-13 days 14-16 days

Other:

9. My interlibrary loan article requests should arrive within:

2 to 3 days 4 to 7 days 8-10 days 11-13 days 14-16 days

Other:

10. The ILL staff did what they could to obtain my requested items.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

11. Library staff were readily available to answer questions about my requests

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

12. I prefer that articles be delivered by (check one):

Electronic mail Internal Mail Being picked up at ILL Office

Other:

13. I prefer the current electronic ILL service (ILLiad) over the previous paper system

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

14. I am satisfied with the overall ILL service:

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

15. Other comments

Thank You

Appendix B: Results

User satisfaction of interlibrary loan services:

R = Respondents A = Agree D = Disagree N = No opinion

	Faculty R = 27			Postgraduates R = 83			Final year students R = 6			Term I staff and others R = 24			Total number of respondents = 140		
	A	D	N	A	D	N	A	D	N	A	D	N	A	D	N
E-Request is convenient	26	0	1	81	0	2	6	0	0	22	1	1	135 (96.43%)	1 (0.71%)	4 (2.86%)
Received timely notifications	25	1	1	72	8	5	6	0	0	20	2	0	123 (87.86%)	11 (7.86%)	6 (4.28%)
Satisfied with delivery time	21	6	0	66	16	1	6	0	0	20	2	2	113 (80.71%)	24 (17.14%)	3 (2.14%)
ILL staff did what they could help	23	0	4	74	4	5	6	0	0	18	1	5	121 (86.43%)	5 (3.6%)	14 (10%)
ILL staff are ready to answer questions	18	2	7	62	13	10	6	0	0	13	1	8	99 (70.71%)	16 (11%)	25 (17.86%)
Satisfied with ILL Office overall performance	24	3	0	73	8	3	6	0	0	20	3	0	123 (87.86%)	14 (10%)	3 (2.14%)
Preferred the new over the in-house system	25	0	2	68	4	11	6	0	0	19	1	4	118 (84.29%)	5 (3.6%)	17 (12.14%)

Users preferred article delivery methods:

E = Email I = Internal mail P = Pickup at ILL office

	Faculty			Postgraduates			Final year students			Term I staff and others			Total number of respondents		
	E	I	P	E	I	P	E	I	P	E	I	P	E	I	P
Preferred article delivery methods	18	5	4	66	9	8	5	0	1	20	2	2	109 (77.86%)	16 (11.43%)	15 (10.71%)